CHAPTER 3

WRITING THE FEATURE, SPEECH, SPORTS AND ACCIDENT STORIES

In Chapter 2, the fundamental aspects of newswriting were covered. Once you master the basics of newswriting, then, and only then, are you ready to wrestle with the more complex news stories. This chapter will help you develop the skills and learn the knowledge necessary to write effective feature, speech, sports and accident stories.

THE FEATURE STORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the characteristics and structure of a feature story and the techniques used in producing a personality feature.

Writing straight news strengthens the writer's powers of observation and builds his skill in using the English language. It impresses on the writer the necessity for ruthless editing until the story is specific, clear and vital.

Conversely, feature writing is not an exact science. Much depends on the skill, imagination and creativeness of the writer.

What is a feature story? It has been called the story that "has to be told." It has also been called simply "human interest." Interest in human beings, and in events because they concern people in situations that might confront anyone else, is called human interest. When a shipboard explosion takes the lives of several crew members and prompts the gallant efforts of other crew members to prevent the loss of the entire crew, the human interest, or appeal, may be of a sympathetic nature. A man with a broken nose might also evoke a sympathetic response. However, if the injury occurred when he walked into a telephone pole while scrutinizing an attractive 1957 Chevrolet on the other side of the street, the appeal might be of a humorous nature.

Certain topics have human interest built in. And, although they may not possess any of the other elements of news value (timeliness, proximity, prominence or consequence), they still have personal appeal. Human interest may fall into many categories, including those in the following list:

- Current topics
- The unusual and the extraordinary
- Mysteries and catastrophes
- Romance and sex
- Adventure and exploits
- Competitive contests
- Child, teen-age and adult life
- Animal life
- Recreations and hobbies
- Business, professional and home activities
- Social welfare
- Success and happiness

In any case, a good human interest story is built around the premise that the reader can easily identify with the subject or event. It involves a fellow human being and a situation that could happen to, or involve, the reader.

Human interest stories not only entertain, but are often informative in that they contain all the elements of a news story. However, the human interest aspect of the story outweighs its value as a straight news story.

Major news events seem to tell themselves. The straight newswriter can set down all the facts, arrange them together with appropriate words and have an adequate news story. The feature, however, must be brought to public attention by the creative writer. As a Navy JO, your job is to recognize the human interest possibilities of stories and turn a drab yarn into a bright one without exaggeration or distortion

CONTENT

The feature story is similar to basic newswriting in that it has a news peg. What sets it far apart, however, is that it emphasizes something new, odd or unusual. Both of these attributes are covered in the following text.

News Peg

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was an event with intense, hard news value. Confrontation between the two strongest world powers could have been the lead paragraph on the story of World War III. Events in this confrontation made the news wires sing for many weeks.

When the USS *Norfolk* intercepted a Russian ship removing missiles from Cuba, the New York Times News Service covered it in a lead that read as follows:

> The captain of a Soviet freighter reluctantly stripped the tarpaulin covers from eight medium-range missiles on the deck of his freighter Friday for photographing by a United States destroyer.

Using this news event as a peg, and realizing that he could not compete with news-service speed in making releases, the PAO aboard *Norfolk* released a feature with a different slant:

> Much of the old-style drama and military dash of the international crisis is a thing of the past. The thrill of "Victory at Sea" is no longer as graphic in its modern context as that famous World War II documentary movie.
>
> Today's coverage of events that shape the lives of nations comes, often as not, from the centers of government and military command posts. For the chess game of world events is no longer played in the smoke of battle, but in planning rooms where statesmen, military personnel and civilians in government call the plays thousands of miles from the scene of the move. ...

New, Odd or Unusual

The event and object sources are rich in feature prospects. Here, the imagination and curiosity of the writer are put to the test. Most hobbies are quite commonplace, yet an ordinary hobby can provide good story material if there is an element of the **new,** the **odd** or the **unusual** connected with it.

In conjunction with hobbies and collections, museums supply fine material for stories. Here the ideas usually come from historical circumstances surrounding the objects of their development. Browse through a museum and ask yourself these questions: Why is this object on display? What significance does it have? What historical event is connected with it?

Stories concerning historical events must be especially well-written and interesting because people do not like to read about events presented in textbook style. However, they are interested in what one person or group did in a particular historical event.

These are a few common areas that produce ideas for articles. There are many others. The point is, the ideas are there and you must open your eyes to them.

REQUIRED FEATURE WRITING SKILLS

To become a successful feature story writer, you must be proficient in the following feature writing skills: grabbing the reader's interest, being observant and writing. about people. These areas are examined in the following text.

Grabbing Reader Interest

To attain reader interest, features may depend on prominence such as that in an event like the Cuban Missile Crisis. The personality profile would also fit here. And, in this case, the relationship between the news elements of proximity and prominence should be considered. For example, a story about one of the space shuttle crew members would be of interest almost anywhere because of the prominence of the subject. How about the CO of Agana Naval Air Station? The proximity to NAS Agana and surrounding communities might make the CO prominent enough to merit a personality sketch in the local Guamanian newspaper, but nowhere else, except perhaps, his hometown.

Consideration for the target readership, then, is important for the writer of feature articles. It soon becomes obvious that attempts to define a feature story fall short, probably because the range of material is as broad as the full range of human experience. Anything people make, do, enjoy or respond to serves as a peg on which to hang the feature story.

Feature stories stir emotions, stimulate, divert and entertain. These objectives could serve as a goal for the feature writer, but they do not tell what feature stories are. Certainly, the account of one nation's warship intercepting the missile-carrying freighter of another in international waters is capable of stirring emotions and stimulating readers of the world.

The story behind the story — the feature story — is the vehicle for unabashed revelation of the human

interest element in any hard news event. The PAO's Cuban missile feature does this as it continues:

> The Cuban Quarantine centers the eye of the world on the Caribbean, while the real events are charted far away in Washington and Moscow. The drama of confrontation is still very much set in scenes of ships patrolling the seas around Cuba. The lines of battle are drawn by ships every bit as powerful, many times as sophisticated, and just as serious as the battleship behemoths of former wars.
>
> When the forces meet, as when the destroyer leader USS *Norfolk* (DL 1) detected the Russian merchantman *Leninisky Kosomol* steaming out of the south Cuban port of Casilda through the receding clouds of a tropical rainstorm, the surface action begins with the flashing light of exchanging calls.
>
> Events followed rapidly as the radio waves emanating from the two ships pulsed messages reporting contact and requesting instructions. Agreements between governments born at United Nations sessions began to be implemented on the high seas. . . .

Being Observant

The successful and prolific feature writer develops a keen, inquisitive faculty for observation. A well-tended landscape is not just a pleasant view to the feature writer. The journalist wonders who keeps it trim and why, inquires into the benefits of conservation or erosion control and the alternatives — wildlife sanctuaries or outdoor living. And chances are, the writer can write the answers received into an interesting feature article.

The power of observation, the habit of accepting nothing at face value, of digging into unanswered questions below the surface of the event, are invaluable to the feature writer.

A prime source of ideas is the daily newspaper. News stories that appear in the newspapers record national, state and local events as they happen. They usually do not give background material or cover all aspects of a story. Yet everyday, news stories appear that open the way for a flood of feature articles.

The ability to take a bare fact from the news page and give it meaning can produce a good article, but here, as in wire service copy, the feature must reflect local interest. For example, a news story mentions a change in income tax regulations; the feature writer shows how this change will affect the reader. Thus the writer localizes the news story and gives it expanded meaning.

Military news, such as changes in regulations, pay, mission or anything affecting military readers, could also interest general readers. The alert and skillful writer can turn these bare facts, and sometimes dull items, into meaningful articles.

Writing About People

The typical military editor of a commercial daily often feels "handouts" (standard news releases) are hounding him to death. They choke his style. They keep him tied to a computer doing rewrites. He would rather be working on a feature angle or out working up an enterprising story. He greets the daily handout pile as the worst part of his job. Why? Not because handouts do not contain legitimate news. Most of them do — buried somewhere behind, in or among fancy, $10 words and reams of promotions.

Reporters say the typical military handout fails most often by the absence of names and addresses of those persons around which the story, event or action is built. They say infractions of several other basic rules of journalism also frequently draw the handout to the wastepaper basket, rather than to the printed page.

However complex and amazing a ship may be, a story that is more iron rather than flesh-and-blood sailors often sails right into the wastebasket along with the larger part of the handouts of the day.

What most media want in the way of a Navy feature is a particular individual — Seaman John B. Boatwright, 20, of 2810 Prairie St., Landlock City — performing his duties to make the vessel an efficient ship. Names, properly spelled and accompanied by ages and addresses, keep wire services and newspapers in business. Details of ships or stations are interesting to people back home, especially if those facts relate to sons, daughters, husbands or hometown acquaintances. A sparkling story about a search and rescue, for example, is a natural, both from hard news and feature standpoints — if those indispensable names, ages and addresses are included.

STRUCTURE

The basic structure of the feature story is divided into three parts: the lead, the body and the conclusion.

Lead

Any standard news or magazine-style lead maybe used to begin a feature story. It should, however, always be written in a reamer appropriate to the subject. Alight, humorous lead, for example, has no place at the beginning of a serious article designed to provoke deep and serious thought in the reader. On the other hand, a ponderous lead is no way to begin alight or humorous piece.

A simple summary lead was used to begin the following story:

> A six-month renovating job on a dilapidated 70-year-old house won praise from a local real estate board for a U.S. Navy captain stationed here.

The preceding lead is adequate as a starter, but another writer used a question lead. The question lead is often used to good effect in feature story writing. Leads like these, when well-phrased, send the reader along into the body in quest of an answer to such a "way-out" question:

> Ever hear of a "hurevac"?
>
> It is a hurricane hideout. The 8,000 acres that constitute the Naval Auxiliary Air Station Meridian, Miss., are a rolling woodland, and it would seem they would be unaffected by the hurricane season hundreds of miles away from Florida. Such, however, is not the case.

Note that in feature writing, the lead often consists of more than a single paragraph Sometimes the lead runs for several paragraphs. Take the following feature lead for example:

> Fifteen months ago, a young Greek Cypriot landed in New York and took a job in a Brooklyn factory devoted to the manufacture of electrical appliances.
>
> When he landed, he could speak only a few words of English and that in a thick accent.
>
> Today that young man is Fireman Andreas Kalivakis, serving as an electrician aboard a U.S. Navy warship. His accent is fast disappearing; his English vocabulary is excellent and he is the owner of a new certificate indicating he has passed all the tests required to prove he has the equivalent of a U.S. high school diploma.

That lead stands the test for feature story leads; it grasps the reader's interest immediately and makes the reader want to read more. A Marine Corps release excited the curiosity of the casual reader with the following lead, then added a startling transition that prepared the reader to take pleasure in completing the story:

> Okinawa is far from the green hills of the United States, but an old-fashioned American-style still is in daily operation there alongside the radio section of Headquarters Company, Ninth Marine Regiment, Third Marine Division.
>
> The still, however, doesn't produce alcoholic beverages — it produces pure, distilled water.

Often a lazy journalist — relying on the belief that sailors are naturally interested in articles concerning their food, pay and equipment — will hang a dull lead on stories about those subjects. However, professional writers will give their best to those stories, because they know these stories will be read by the greatest number of people and be of service to them.

A dramatic example of wide interest to food comes from the guided-missile destroyer USS *Semmes.* Annual competition for the Ney Award for the best mess afloat sparked an enterprising skipper to support wider dissemination of his ship's cooking secrets. *Semmes* published a cookbook of Navy recipes, cut to manageable portions, and the whole country took note.

Food editors featured the story in papers in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, St. Louis and Boston, as well as Charleston, S.C., Dayton, Ohio, Evansville, Ind. and Norfolk and Portsmouth, Va. Also, numerous network and local radio/television stations made wide use of the feature material.

Veronica Volpe of the Pittsburgh *Press* wrote the following example:

> For those unaware of the military usage of the word, the phrase 'the best small mess in the Navy' might have questionable connotation, least of all merit. Not so to the crew members of the USS *Semmes* just returned from a Mediterranean tour and now undergoing overhaul in Norfolk, Va.
>
> The military usage of "mess" relates to its original meaning — that of a group of persons who eat their meals together, as do the men of a ship's company or an Army group. . . .

An important fact to keep in mind when writing about Navy equipment and weapons is that the reader can soon lose interest in a dull story about a machine or weapon. The reader is interested in the men and women in uniform who will handle, install, maintain and operate those inanimate — and intrinsically dull — pieces of hardware.

The effect of the machine on the person, and the person on the machine, must be presented in a way that emphasizes people, and the writer must make those people into rounded characters who become real in the reader's mind. In other words, the story must have human interest.

The writer of the following feature lead did just that by beginning a story in the following way:

> The machine, a metal monstrosity, squatted in the center of the metal deck, circled by a knot of Navy men: a bemused young officer, three puzzled sailors and a knowing old chief.
>
> "I know what it's supposed to do," the first sailor said, "and I know where we're supposed to bolt it down, but who's ever going to operate a Rube Goldberg puzzle like that?"
>
> "You are, buster," the old chief said, "and **. . .**

Body

When you write the body of a feature story, it is important for you to avoid monotony. You do this by varying sentence length, however, long sentences must be clear and easy to understand.

Note the varied sentence length in the following feature from the Indianapolis *News:*

> The first — and last — issues of eight newspapers were published at Ft. Benjamin Harrison the other day.
>
> But their brief life span had little relationship to the energy and interest devoted to their publication. The papers were the last journalism exercises for 70 servicemen and women, graduating with a newspaper in one hand, and a diploma from the Defense Media Institute at Ft. Harrison in the other.
>
> From all the armed forces, staffers in the "quill and scroll" exercise got a glimpse into their military future. These military journalists will go to assignments throughout the world. Many will find jobs on more permanent newspaper staffs, using what they learned at Ft. Harrison.
>
> Nine weeks ago, this basic military journalist class began. Since then students have spent 209 classroom hours in the Basic Journalism Department. ...

Another point to note is the use of quoted material to carry the story along. Skillfully conducted interviews with articulate experts will provide the writer with quotations. Such quotations, interspersed with expository material, help move a story along and maintain a lively spark throughout. Explanations and readily comprehensible revelations from authorities in a given field impart an air of authenticity to writing, particularly in stories about technical subjects, such as rocketry, instruments, engine improvements, jet engine overhaul and nuclear propulsion.

However he or she chooses to explain technical subjects, the writer should always remember the need to translate technical terms into lay language for the sake of the general audience. When this is not possible, the writer must define the technical terms.

When you write a feature on a technical subject, use the following points to help you plan and organize the body of your material:

- Make paragraph beginnings forceful to impel the reader through the story.

- Use technical terms sparingly, and include informal definitions as you go along.
- Dress up difficult or dull passages with human interest items.
- Quote authorities as necessary to make the reader feel the facts are authentic.
- Simplify facts by the use of analogy.
- Break down statistical material into figures the reader can comprehend.
- Compare scientific concepts and technology to objects with which the reader is familiar.
- Weave the necessary background into the story for unity and coherence.

For example, assume you are describing some microtubing used in a new guided missile. If you tell the readers it is three one-thousandths of an inch in diameter, they will have trouble visualizing it. Tell them it compares in size to a human hair and they can visualize its size immediately.

In another story, you can point out that a new jet aircraft carries more than 17,000 gallons of fuel. This is an impressive figure, but it does not mean much to the average reader. It would be more meaningful for you to tell the reader that the same amount of gasoline could power his car for the next 20 years.

Whenever possible, avoid generalizations. Use figures to backup any broad claims you may make. Do not merely say that the average sailor uses too much water aboard ship. Add force and emphasis to the statement with understandable figures. Tell the reader the average sailor drinks from two to four quarts of water a day. He uses five gallons of water daily merely to shave, brush his teeth and wash his hands. Cleaning and food preparation in the galley takes an additional five to eight gallons per crew member. In addition, he uses up to 10 gallons of water when he takes a shower. Then tell the reader why this is important: because the Navy "makes" its own water, drop by drop, by distilling it from seawater.

If pictures are not available and you have to describe a mechanical device, describe it in terms with which the reader is familiar: "The Navy's new supercavitating propeller looks like the screw part of an ordinary kitchen food grinder."

In studying feature techniques, the writer should not overlook the finest training material of all — the published work of other feature writers. When you discover a piece in a newspaper or magazine that particularly interests you, you should read it again and analyze the devices the author used to make the work interesting, informative, entertaining or gripping. With a little adaptation and practice you can make the same techniques your own.

One thing you will probably discover is that when a story leaves you with a satisfying aftertaste, it is often because it was good enough to hold your interest to the end — and because the ending was a piece of artistic writing in itself.

Conclusion

The conclusion of all good feature stories terminates the article in a positive manner. As in the lead, the writer is limited only by the ability in composing a conclusion.

One device frequently used is to summarize the key points of the story. Another way to end a story is to present a new fact, generally a fact that highlights the importance of the subject of the article. No matter how you do it, though, the ending should leave the reader satisfied that the time spent reading the piece was time well-spent. If you provided a tantalizing lead and a well-constructed body that held the reader's interest, you owe to the story and the reader an equally well-written conclusion.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the feature lead example about USS *Norfolk* intercepting the Russian missile-loaded freighter sums up the action and puts the story in a new light by using a different twist. Consider the following excerpt:

> Eventually, on orders from Moscow, canvas was rolled back on all eight 70-foot missiles. In six hours, governments had been contacted, orders issued and received, proving photographs taken, and not a shot was fired.
>
> Suddenly the meeting was news — as much so as if it had been a major naval engagement — but not a shot was fired. The dull patrol of USS *Norfolk* had been broken, and momentarily the endless watches became meaningful. Its mission had been accomplished.
>
> The next day, *Norfolk* returned to its station on the now familiar patrol and observed a famous armistice on

> Veterans Day, November 1962, itself the new veteran maintaining the armistice in a new kind of war.
>
> Not a shot had been fired. The "war" in Cuba was still cold.

A choice quote from an interview often makes a good ending for a feature story. The following example is how a Navy journalist concluded a story about a group of circuit-riding Navy dentists and technicians conducting a people-to-people dental program in Africa:

> "We're glad to get out with the African people," said Nicholl (a chief dental technician). "The fact that there's an element of danger in it is overshadowed by the thanks of the people we're helping. We've never left a village or hamlet without a barrage of cheering and clapping from our patients."

The story on the new piece of machinery ended with the following paragraphs:

> Sure, they had hated it to begin with, that monstrous machine, but now it was their monstrous machine. Constant association and the care they had lavished on it had made it their baby. The ugly monster had become an object of beauty to them, a delicate thing to be protected.
>
> A passing journalist, new on board, stopped to drink in its loveliness. He looked as though he might be going to touch her. "Keep your cotton-pickin' hands off the baby," Quinlon snarled, and the other two baby-tenders curled their lips at the JO until he scuttled away.

PERSONALITY FEATURE

The personality feature is similar to other features in that it appeals to people's interest in other people. It normally points out special achievement, success or obstacles surmounted in life and centers on a particular event or achievement.

Personality features differ from other features in that they are almost always about a single individual. This type of feature gives interesting information about the person's life, rather than just the person's opinions. The properly written personality feature is a vivid word picture of the subject's personality traits and physical features as well as a description of the things that make the person unusual or interesting. The effective personality feature leaves readers feeling they have met the subject face to face and know that individual personally.

Research

Since the personality feature story delves so deeply into the subject's traits and physical features, considerable research is required. Most of the required information must be gathered through interviews. Conduct interviews with the subject and persons who intimately know the subject or have something to contribute. Some information can also be obtained from printed background material and from personal observations of friends and associates of the subject.

Personality features should contain the following information:

- **Biographical data.** Use only that biographical data you feel is necessary to your story (i.e., age, hometown, parents' names, major duty assignments, time in service, marital status, etc.). Unimportant statistics and data tend to bog a story down and make for dry reading. The tone of a story usually dictates the amount of data required.
- **Description.** Describe the person, the details of the setting, surroundings and general atmosphere.
- **Quotes.** Use quotations from the interviewee in which that individual's principles for attaining success, and so forth, are related.
- **General accounting.** Present a general sketch of personal achievement, success, and so forth, in the words of the interviewee or friends of that person.

Presentation of Information

In addition to the feature writing methods mentioned earlier in this chapter, personality features require a few techniques all their own. There are methods that can be used to enable you, as the writer, to make your readers feel they have met your subject face to face, heard that person speak, seen the individual act and know the thoughts or opinions and past life of the person. These methods are discussed in the following text:

JO1 Jim Bryant

Figure 3-1.—Subject of a personality feature in her environment.

- Telling of characteristic mannerisms and actions
- Using direct quotations in a characteristic manner
- Actually describing the subject's personal appearance, demeanor, facial expressions and dress in his or her environment (fig. 3-1)
- Giving the opinions of others about the subject
- Showing how friends and associates react to the subject

The following personality feature excerpts should help you see how some of the techniques are used:

> Bryan Tyler of the station's imaging facility approaches his art seriously — with strong conviction and knowledge developed by extensive formal training and much practice.
>
> He does not like photo contests but has won many. He would rather focus on the effects of people than photograph people themselves — but does both well. ...
>
> Tyler is a sensitive artist who why he takes photographs. ...
>
> "I like taking peopleless photographs that relate directly to man either by content or implication," as Tyler puts it.
>
> During a tour of duty in Washington, the lanky Virginian worked primarily with official portraits.
>
> "It can be frustrating shooting portraits," emphasizes Tyler as he strokes his bushy black hair. "Everyone dressed the same with his only identity worn on his sleeve and placed in the same sterile environment. The portraits I keep, and feel satisfied with, show people in their own environment, or in a meaningful situation, hopefully conveying some insight into the subject."
>
> "In Petty Officer Tyler, I think we have one of the Navy's finest," said his commanding officer, Capt. Rose Grosbeak. "There's not one person here who doesn't feel that way about Bryan."
>
> Tyler finds stimulation and excitement in searching for and producing meaningful photographs, even in the most mundane jobs. ...
>
> "Photography should never end," Tyler reflects. "All you should do is change subjects and fulfill some meaningful purpose, either to me or to the person for whom I am shooting."

The material presented here gives the beginning feature writer a start in the right direction. Writing courses, taken from time to time, can help. Criticism from experienced feature writers and editors is a great aid. Studying the work of other writers, as mentioned earlier, is a fine guide to improvement. Reading about writing alone, however, never taught anyone to write. Like the disciplines of newswriting, the art of feature writing is learned by doing — **by writing.**

Helene C. Stikkel
Figure 3-2.—A speech story features something not officially disclosed before.

THE SPEECH STORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: *Recognize the fundamentals of writing a speech story.*

Often, Navy JOs become jittery when first assigned to cover a speech story because they do not think they can get the facts or put them into story form. Actually, any writer who knows the fundamentals of news reporting can write a speech story.

First, the writing of a speech story resembles any other news story in many aspects. The most important fact, the climax of the story, goes in the lead. This usually means that the most important thing the speaker said goes in the lead. Occasionally, the most important fact may be something unusual — audience reaction, for instance — but generally, what the speaker said, either in quote or summary, is the feature.

The Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) may cover four major topics during an address, but the main point may have been the disclosure of a pay increase for all military personnel. This fact goes into the lead as depicted in the following text:

> "All active-duty military personnel will get a four percent pay increase January 1," said Defense Secretary Justin N. Case in a speech before the National Press Club last night.

Merely that a speaker appeared before an audience has very little story merit. The speaker must say something newsworthy — something that has not been officially disclosed before. This normally happens when a speaker appears before the media in a news conference (fig. 3-2).

The subject title of the speech is rarely important enough to become part of the lead. Speech titles are usually catch phrases that reveal very little about what is the most important part of the story. For example, when the President of the United States speaks, the lead features what he said in the following manner:

> "The president, in a major speech tonight, called for another tax cut. ..."

If the writer started off with the information that the president spoke, no one would have much insight into the importance of the speech.

In structuring the speech story lead, include **what** was said and **who** said it. **When** and **where** it was said can usually be included within the lead, if the lead does not become too cumbersome. If it does, include them in the second paragraph.

Usually a direct quote lead will not do, for most speakers do not summarize their talk in one sentence. Thus the writer should paraphrase the lead, summarizing what the speaker said in one brief sentence.

PARAPHRASING

When you paraphrase, you must be careful to keep the speaker's meaning. Do not quote out of context; that is, do not quote a sentence that gives a wrong impression when used alone.

For example, a reporter hears the president say, "I haven't decided to seek reelection. However, I have instructed my staff not to be too hasty in looking for new employment." If the journalist had quoted that first sentence alone, he would have given the impression that the president was not planning to run for another term in office, when that obviously was not what the president meant.

QUOTES

When quoting, wait for a striking phrase or summary of a key point. Use quotes in a speech story to give the flavor of the speaker's talk. With quotes you can convey to the reader what the talk was like. To do this, the writer need not quote whole paragraphs because they make the copy dull. A few good quotes scattered throughout the story are enough.

To use quotes, you must understand the basics of quoting. A quotation must consist of the speaker's exact words. The writer should not change one word. You must use quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quote as in the next example: "I think, therefore, I am." You must use a comma to set off the quoted part of the following sentence: He said, "That did it." To add the words "he said" at the end of the sentence, put the comma after the quoted matter and before the quote marks: "That did it," he said.

When quoted matter does not make a sentence, use no comma and no capital letter to introduce the quote as in the following example: He did not "purge them." Note the periods and commas are always inside the quotation marks. No comma is needed after a quote if it asks a question such as in the following: "Did you go?" he asked. Also, no comma is needed with a quoted exclamation point as in the next example: "What a view!" yelled the astronaut.

On occasion, a speaker may make an error he does not acknowledge during a speech or news conference. If you must use this particular quoted material, insert [sic] immediately after the error. This shows, for the record, that the speaker made the error and not the writer. Consider the following example:

> "NASA has experienced a very good safety record since the Challenger disaster in early January [sic] 1986. During this time frame. ..."

Handling Long Quotes

Consecutive paragraphs of quotations do not require quotation marks at the end of each paragraph. These are required only when the entire quote ends. You do, however, begin each new paragraph with quotes. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, you can write more effectively by not using long quotes.

The ellipsis is a device of punctuation used in quoting. It consists of three spaced periods (. . .) used to show omission of a word or words necessary to complete a statement or quotation. If a quote is long and a writer wants to use it, the writer can delete the unnecessary words by using the ellipsis. However, too many beginners go wild with the ellipsis. They overuse it, sticking the three dots in every sentence. If you must use several ellipses to convey the message, it is better that you paraphrase the sentence.

If the writer starts a quote in the middle of a speaker's sentence, the ellipsis need not be used before the quoted words. For example, the speaker may have said the following: "Considering all factors, and my staff has done that for many months, I feel the trainee would be ready for duty in a combat zone after 20 weeks of basic training instead of the present eight." A JO's sentence may read like the following: General Needam said, "The trainee would be ready for duty in a combat zone after 20 weeks of basic training instead of the present eight."

Then, if you want to end a quote in the middle of the speaker's sentence, leave four dots — three for the ellipsis and one for the regular period as follows: "The trainee would be ready for duty in a combat zone after 20 weeks of basic training. ..."

Quoting is only a part of writing the speech story. The writer must still identify the speaker no later than the second paragraph. Many times the speaker will be identified in the lead.

Even when you think a person is well-known, you must still include a frill name and full title in the story. That way the reader will know exactly who you are quoting and will not confuse that person with someone else with the same name or similar position.

If someone is relatively unknown, you may use a general job title for the first identification, such as a college president or a city administrate. Include the speaker's name in the second paragraph.

Quote-Summary Method

Combining the guidelines concerning quotes and the material covered earlier about identification, a lead and the second paragraph for a typical speech story should read in the following way:

> President Roland Coaster has asked the Defense Department to revise its training and education systems so every man and woman in service will come out with a skill marketable in the civilian economy.
>
> In his annual manpower report to Congress, the president said, "There are some military specialists whose training does not lead directly to civilian employment. To help them, I

Quote	"Take care of your men and women. They are the Navy's most precious resources."
Summary	This was the keynote of a speech delivered Friday by Rear Adm. Helen O. Troy, Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Education and Training. Speaking before the class of the Naval Officer Candidate School here, Adm. Troy emphasized the importance of maintaining good relations between officers and enlisted personnel.
Quote	"The Navy into which you are now going for your first assignment has a number of problems facing it," Adm. Troy said. "One of the most serious is the failure of a high percentage of our first cruise Navy men and women to reenlist."
Summary	Citing current facts and figures, the admiral pointed out that the reenlistment rate among first-termers was low. It would have to be doubled if the Navy hoped to meet its manning requirements 10 years from now.
Quote	"You must know your men and women and take care of them," the admiral continued. "These are the cardinal rules. But I add two more: know what they are supposed to know, and help them learn it."
Summary	Adm. Troy advised the graduating officers to study the same training manuals the enlisted community studies for advancement. She told them to use the same terms and the same approaches to their work that are taught to enlisteds in their schools and in their textbooks.
Quote	"There is no substitute for competence," the admiral said. "When we are fat with peace and when our ships are cruising in quite waters, enlisteds may list fairness, kindliness, and similar qualities as what they desire most in their officers. But come war and heavy winds," she added, "they look for competence, ability, knowledge, and know-how."
Summary	In closing, the admiral advised the graduates to guard the welfare of their sailors as they do their own, and there would be no first-term reenlistment problem.

Figure 3-3.—Speech story using the quote-summary method.

> have asked the Secretary of Defense to make available, to the maximum extent possible, in-service training and educational opportunities that will increase their chances for employment in civilian life."

An example of a lead with a lesser-known person may read as follows:

> The Navy's Chief of Information said in a speech last night that his office was requesting more than 100 additional public affairs duties and emphasized that a preplanned public affairs program was essential.

In the second paragraph the writer usually gives a fuller identification of the speaker, the occasion of the speech, where it was given, and, if there is room and it is noteworthy, the attendance. Next, the writer uses the quote-summary method of organization.

The quote-summary method uses one paragraph of quotes from the speaker, then one of the writer's paraphrase. It does not matter which comes first - quote or summary. This method allows the reader to get the flavor of the speech through the quotes but enables the writer to reduce the length of his story by summarizing large portions.

For example, the following is a quoted paragraph followed by a paraphrased paragraph:

> "Our children can read, write, spell, do arithmetic and use grammar, which is more important than learning a lot of meaningless rules."
>
> In criticizing drill, or rote, teaching, the school superintendent argued that under former methods a child might win a medal in American history and still not understand the meaning of American democracy.

Notice that the paragraph of summary is related to the quoted one. The speech story, like any other, keeps related material together. Figure 3-3 illustrates a speech story using the quote-summary method.

ATTRIBUTION

Besides the organization of the story, the JO must be aware of other problems in the speech story. **Attribution —** identifying the source of information or opinion — is needed in almost every paragraph. The writer must make it clear who is talking. Thus the writer should include attribution often. Beginners should attribute every sentence expressing opinion, for too often the reader forgets, and it seems the writer is making the statements in the story.

Attribution may consist merely of the phrase "he said." However, to be sure the reader does not forget who the speaker is, the writer should occasionally insert the speaker's name. The writer may put the attribution at the beginning, middle or end of the sentence, but the natural place for attribution is at the end of the sentence.

When writing a speech story, never use such words, unless quoted, as "I," "our," "us," "we," "me," "you" or "your." Standing alone, these words represent the writer's viewpoint. So, if the speaker says our country needs more nuclear surface ships, the writer says: "The United States needs more nuclear surface ships." If the speaker says "I," it means just that and not the newswriter.

"SAID" AND OTHER VERBS

Many reporters covering speeches are tempted to use vivid words to describe how the speaker talked. Unfortunately, the truth often conflicts with the vivid verbs. The best verb to use is "said." Here is the natural and neutral link between the speaker and what he said. But many writers feel their creativity is stifled by using too many "saids." There are, of course, synonyms like "cajoled," "pleaded," "beseeched," "asked," "murmured," "digressed," "asserted," "told" "declared" and thousands of others that can often be used for variety.

When using these words to describe how the speaker expressed himself, be sure you describe the speaker's emotions accurately. Always be alert to exact meaning and connotation.

PAINTING A PICTURE

To add more color to the story, the writer may occasionally describe interesting hand movements or gestures the speaker made. An example appeared earlier in this chapter when Petty Officer Tyler emphasized a point as he stroked his "bushy black hair."

When former Russian Premier Khrushchev removed his shoe and pounded it on a table at the United Nations, every story covering his speech included it high in the account. Most speakers will not be that flamboyant, but they may raise a hand toward the ceiling or pound on the lectern for emphasis. An occasional mention of this adds flavor to the story and points up what the speaker feels is important.

GETTING THE FACTS

Before writing the speech story, you must get the facts. Most reporters depend on tape recordings or a copy of the speech. Frequently, a speaker may be approached — either directly or through his public affairs staff — for a copy of the speech if it is not supplied in advance.

Should you find yourself in a situation where you must rely on your own note-taking to gather facts, make sure you get the main points of the speech. A JO is not expected to be a stenographer, but you will still be held accountable for what you write. So listen carefully and write those quotes accurately.

Most professional reporters have their own system of note taking, which usually consists of shortcuts. For example, a writer may drop all vowels from words — sailor becomes "sir," soldier becomes "sldr," and so on. Similarly, the reporter may not dot the "i' s" and cross the "t's" when writing rapidly. If you want to write down the word ***responsibility,*** you might dash off ***"respons"*** and later, when looking over the notes, the scribbling will be understood. Use your notes while they are fresh in your mind.

By using a homemade shorthand, you can listen to the meaning of the speech. You are waiting for the important points of the speech, not mechanically copying down every word as a stenographer does.

In summary, remember the following key ideas about speech stories:

- The most important fact goes in the lead (what and who said it).
- Use ellipses to handle long quotations.
- Use the quote-summary method to organize the story.
- Learn to attribute information or opinion in the story.
- Use vivid words carefully.

Tony Giberson
Figure 3-4.—Rugby is one of a wide array of Navy sports the Navy journalist will cover.

- Get the facts straight. (Use your notes, tape recorder and a copy of the speech when possible.)

THE SPORTS STORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Recognize the principle of sports writing, the structure of a sports story, the use of quotes, the various sports writing rules and considerations and the sources of sports information.

Sportswriting, whether it is for a great metropolitan daily or for a four-page internal Navy publication, can be the very lifeblood of a publication. No other editorial phase of a newspaper has quite so much to offer the imagination and creativity (fig. 3-4).writer — or so much to challenge the writer's

Sportswriting is a difficult side of journalism. It is tricky for the sportswriter who regularly covers a National Football League team. It is tricky for the JOSN who wades through the task of writing an eight-inch story about a touch football game played on the base yesterday.

For some people, sportswriting is easier than for others, probably because they are athletes or because they are longtime fans. It is not true, however, that only ex-jocks and channel-hopping sports addicts can write sports. With a little training and practice, any writer can become, at least, an adequate sportswriter.

SPORTS WRITING STRUCTURE

Writing about a game or a sporting event is essentially the same as writing a straight news story. Like straight news, sports stories are written in the inverted pyramid style (discussed in the previous chapter). The main difference between sports and news writing is in the lead. A sports lead usually emphasizes the **who** and **how** of an event, while a straight news lead usually emphasizes the **who** and **what.**

Like a news story, the lead is normally a one-sentence summary of the essential Ws and H, the bridge links the lead to the body, and the body is written to present facts in descending order of importance.
We will now examine the lead, bridge and body of sports stories in more detail.

Lead

Sports leads normally use the who and how as the lead emphasis. Leads should include the **who, what, when, where** and **how.** The **who** may be the teams involved or the names of key players. The **what** will normally be the name of the sport, league or tournament. The **when** should be the date or day of the event, and the **where** should be the location of the event. The **how** is usually a brief description of how the game or contest was won and the score.

SUMMARY LEAD. —In a summary lead, the **who** and **how** will be the lead emphasis. The final score should be in the lead and **not** repeated elsewhere in the story. Many beginning writers, in an attempt to summarize the game, repeat the score in the body. This is wrong. If the reader forgets the score, he can easily refer to the lead.

Consider the following example:

> Alvin Gecko's second-half scoring binge led the Pensacola Goshawks to a come-from-behind 94-93 victory over the Saufley Mole Chickens in Wednesday night's basketball opener at Tallship Field House.
>
> .

In this example, the lead emphasis is Alvin Gecko (who) and his scoring binge (how). This is a classic who and how summary lead, highlighting the key player and how the game was won. This is the tried-and-true sports lead, and the type all sportswriters should master.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION LEAD.— The background information lead is another type of lead you should know about. It is a lead many sportswriters now use, especially when writing about games that have been broadcast over radio or television. Since readers are likely to know in advance the final score, who won and how the game was won, many sportswriters write leads that emphasize background information or locker room quotes to attract the reader.

The following is an example:

> If Myra Naviete's sprained ankle slowed her down Saturday night, you couldn't prove it to the Naval Station Miami Pirates.

> The speedy forward, who was sidelined three games because of an injury, scored 23 points to lead the Naval Security Group Hialeah Seminoles to a 56-37 victory over the Pirates in women's basketball action at Milander Gym.

Or:

> Ugly.

> That's the word coach Thomas Katt used to. describe his Century Dolphins' 88-79 basketball victory over Rainbow Central here Friday night.

> (Bridge) "We stunk up the gym," Katt said. "I hate to say it," he added, "but the better team lost tonight."

Note that these leads emphasize background information and are not one-sentence summary leads. They still include the essential Ws and H, however. Some newer journalism textbooks advise sportswriters to write this type of lead and to stay away from the simple summary lead You may wish to follow this advice as you develop your sportswriting skills, but first you should master the bread-and-butter summary lead.

Bridge

Bridges in sports stories serve the same purpose as news story bridges, primarily to link the lead to the body. Like news story bridges, they are often categorized by the purposes they serve, easily remembered with the acronym **WAITS:**

- **W—** Ws or H not answered in the lead are answered in the bridge.
- **A—** Attributes information found in the lead.
- **I—** Identifies persons or groups impersonally identified in the lead.
- **T—** Ties the story back to a previous story.
- **S—** Secondary facts are brought out in the bridge.

Very often, sports bridges are used to bring out secondary facts that explain the significance of the game. The bridge might, for example, explain that a loss drops the team into the losers' bracket in a tournament, that a victory ties the team for the league lead, that a loss marks the fourth in a row for the team, or any other important consequence.

Consider the example that follows:

> The shutout is the first suffered by the Fightin' Giant Lampreys since losing 24-0 to the USS *Greystone* in the second game of the 1992 season — 39 games ago.

Or:

> The victory extends USS Saufley's winning streak to eight and extends its lead to four games over the second-place Naval Hospital in the Blue and Gold Division.

Body

Many beginning sportswriters incorrectly write the bodies of their sports stories chronologically. However, if the key play took place in the fifth inning or the third quarter, that is where the body should begin. Usually, the key play will be one that breaks a tie or gives the winning team the go-ahead margin. In baseball, it might be a four-run inning; in football, it might be a 60-yard touchdown pass; and, in basketball, it might be two clutch free throws in the final seconds.

Sometimes, the key will be a defensive play. It might be a blocked punt or a diving catch in the outfield

that prevents three runs from scoring. Sometimes, no single play will stand out. Then it is up to the writer to choose what to highlight. Analyzing statistics and interviewing coaches or players after the game can help you isolate turning points in the game.

If a key play happens to be an error, do not be afraid to write about it. Athletes put themselves in the public eye whenever they take the field, opening themselves to praise and criticism. If, however, you are writing about youth activities or Little League game, it is appropriate to avoid mentioning the name of the player who committed the error. In such cases, attribute the error to the team or position.

It is not necessary to write about every inning, period or quarter of a contest. If nothing of consequence happened during a period or over several innings, you do not have to explain that nothing happened. Rather, you may briefly explain with an introductory phrase like, "After two scoreless innings . .." or "Neither team could move the ball until ..." Do not bog your story down with detailed accounts of each batter or each ball possession; focus on the key plays.

USE OF SPORTS QUOTES

Quotes are used in the same manner as in newswriting. If you have quotes from coaches or players, weave them into the story. Use them to introduce, support or explain your account.

For example:

> 'We knew that (Scott) Glengarry was going to beat the secondary sometime," said Blue Knights head coach Marc Antonius. "It was just a matter of time. With his speed, nobody is going to deny him for four quarters," he added.
>
> Beat the secondary, he did. On a third-and-12, following a holding penalty, Glengarry raced down the right sideline, then slanted toward the middle. Quarterback Cocoa Butler hit him at the 20, and Price could have walked in from there.

Or:

> The Battlin' Lemmings switched to a 2-1-2 zone early in the third period, and Stevens scored only two field goals the rest of the way.
>
> "Gordian was killing us in the low post," explained Earwigs coach Kelly Pritchard. "When we went to the zone," he added, "we were able to double-team him and clog up the middle."

ATTRIBUTION

Unlike newswriting, sportswriting requires little attribution. About the only attribution needed is for quotes or paraphrases. If the writer witnesses a game or event, he can write about the action without attribution. If he writes the story from scorebooks, he need not attribute the information because it is a matter of record.

SUPERLATIVES AND COLORFUL VERBS

As an observer, the sportswriter may inject his opinions concerning the action he witnesses. He might describe a team's defense as "sloppy." He might describe a catch in the outfield as "miraculous" or a basketball player's leaping ability as "gravity-defying." In newswriting, this is considered editorializing; in sports, it is the observation of a qualified observer. Do not overdo it, however, and do not confuse this freedom with license to break the rules of newswriting. Save the superlatives for when they are warranted and for when you are confident you know what you are talking about. When in doubt, play it safe.

Similarly, the sportswriter is free to use colorful verbs or adjectives to describe how one team "smashed" or "clawed" its way to victory. People who read the sports pages or listen to sports broadcasts are accustomed to such language and expect it.

Do not, however, get colorful verbs confused with cliches. If you write "smacked the apple," you are resorting to a cliche. If you write, "smacked the ball," you are using a colorful verb.

It is all right to use sports jargon, such as "threw a bomb," "lobbed an alley-oop," "turned a 6-4-3 double play" or "busted a monster jam," when writing game accounts.

SPORTS TERMINOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

You must know the terminology and the rules of the sport you are writing about. If you are not familiar with the sport, it is wise for you to start reading the sports sections of as many newspapers as possible to see how experienced writers cover games.

Use the terminology for the sport you are writing about. If you are new to sportswriting and are not sure of the terminology, play it safe. It is better for you to say a batter "hit" the ball or a quarterback "threw" a pass than to wrongly use words like "slammed" or "launched." You will lose your credibility fast if you write that a team "edged" another team, 104-57, or that a quarterback "fired a nine-yard bomb."

Write in the active voice as much as possible. Do not write "was won," "were victorious," and so forth. Write, instead, "defeted," "blanked," "overwhelmed," and so on.

TROUBLESOME WORDS

A couple of words common in sportswriting trouble grammarians and some sports editors. The words are "win" and "host."

Technically, "win" should not be used as a noun, and "host" should not be used as a verb, although many respected sportswriters and editors now accept such usage. Check with your editor before you write something like, "The victory marked the seventh straight win for the Eagles" or "The Eagles host the Naval Station Cervantes Cavaliers Friday."

A similar usage problem arises with team names and pronouns. It is wrong for you to say, "NAS Pensacola began their drive on the 30-yardline." "NAS Pensacola" is singular and "their" is plural. You should write, "NAS Pensacola began its drive. ..." You should use "their," however, when you refer to a team by its plural nickname — Battlin' Lemmings, Blue Knights, Fightin' Giant Lampreys, Dolphins, and so forth:

RANKS, NAMES AND NICKNAMES

In military sportswriting, it is common practice not to use ranks. However, your CO or office SOP may require their use.

Similarly, middle initials and such designations as "Jr." or "III" are not used in sportswriting.

Nicknames, however, are common and should be used. The usual style for first reference is as follows: first name/nickname in quotation marks/last name. Note the following examples: Elvis 'Toast" Patterson or Evander "Real Deal" Holyfield. Sometimes the nickname comes before the first name, as in "Neon" Deion Sanders. On second reference, only the last name is used.

NAMES AND NUMBERS

Just as in newswriting, names and numbers should stand out as red flags while copy editing; each must be double-checked. The difference in sports is that there are likely to be a lot more of both names and numbers.

Double-check name spellings and make sure numbers are correct. Also, make sure numbers add up, both in the story and in box or line scores.

SIDELIGHTS

Do not confine your story to action that takes place on the field. Use sidelight information that may interest the reader: the size of the crowd, injuries that might have affected the outcome of the game, weather conditions, and so forth.

TYPES OF SPORTS TO COVER

Sports encompasses more than just the big three (baseball/softball, football and basketball). On military installations, there are a number of other sports and recreational activities that warrant coverage, including bowling, tennis, racquetball, squash, golf, darts, boxing, wrestling, gymnastics, running, youth sports, and hunting and fishing.

STRINGERS

For you to have a variety of sports coverage in your newspaper, you may have to develop a stringer system. It is important you remember that stringers are seldom trained journalists. Therefore, it is usually necessary for you to provide them with some training and brief them on your newspaper style and deadlines. More information on using stringers may be found in *Handbook for Stringers in the Armed Forces* (NAVMC 26-84) and in the *JO 1&C TRAMAN,* Chapter 7.

SOURCES OF SPORTS INFORMATION

A problem for many beginning sportswriters is knowing where to gather the needed information. Consider the following sources and note that officials are omitted from the list because they are seldom, if ever, a source of information:

- **Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR)** for the ins and outs of recreation, intramural and youth programs, including rules, schedules and official scorebooks.

JO1 Jim Bryant

Figure 3-5.—The Navy Journalist will write about many types of accidents, such as this automobile vs. motorcycle mishap.

- **Coaches and managers** for details about team members, lineups and rosters, game plans, quotes and information about a contest, especially a contest you did not cover yourself.

- **Team members** for accounts of what happened in the game. Be cautious. Many losing teams tend to blame the loss on the officiating, whether they lost by one point or 30 points.

- **Official scorers** for game statistics and score-books. If you run a box score of the game, be sure your stats match those of the official scorer.

- **Fans** for color and sidelight information, where appropriate. Often used in sidebar stories, fan reactions can help tell the story of a team's success or misfortune.

Officials are impartial and usually refuse to comment. If an official's call is vital to the story, do not expect him to explain or justify it unless it is a matter of rule interpretation. **Never** ask an official about judgment calls (balls and strikes, close calls on the bases, whether a receiver was in or out of bounds when he caught a pass, whether a basketball player traveled, etc.). Officials are, however, legitimate subjects for personality and rules clinic features.

Additional sports coverage guidelines (including help on compiling statistics) maybe found in the latest edition of *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.*

THE ACCIDENT STORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the structure of the accident story and the methods used to gather accident news.

Five sailors are killed when one falls asleep at the wheel of his car after a weekend liberty.

A young Navy ensign dies in a flaming plane crash when something goes wrong with his jet during a routine training hop.

A Marine accidentally shoots a buddy with a gun he did not think was loaded.

An airman crosses an aircraft flight line and walks into the blades of a spinning propeller.

A civilian painter plunges to his death from a three-story Navy building when the lines in a scaffold break.

An explosion at a base facility kills 15 people and injures 35 others.

A Navy dependent child dies in an ambulance after drinking something from the family's medicine cabinet.

Accidents and disasters such as these take hundreds of lives each year. In addition to destroying life and property, they cause untold pain, misery and suffering to the victims' friends and relatives.

Yet, despite the undesirability of this type of news from the Navy's viewpoint, covering and writing accident stories is part of your job (fig. 3-5).

The following is an important tenet of Navy public affairs: **Accident news cannot be avoided or withheld, and it must be released.** The amount of information released varies with security and next of kin considerations.

Accidents can happen anytime and anywhere. Because they are unpredictable, unfortunate and undesirable as a source of news, the JO who covers and writes accident stories must be especially careful in handling them.

Accidents involve both life and death. They may cause human suffering, heartache and anxiety. Also, because accidents sometimes result from carelessness or negligence, they may injure reputations or lead to disciplinary action. A careless word or phrase in an accident story may cause great damage to the Navy, to individuals involved and to the careless writer. Therefore, **accuracy is of utmost importance** in the accident story.

In collecting information for a story, the journalist must be careful to avoid gossip and conjecture. You must be able to seek out proper authorities and get your information right the first time. You may not have the opportunity to verify it later.

You must stick to the concrete facts, resist any temptation to hide or cover up legitimate news, maintain high standards of good taste and, above all, be familiar with security restrictions and other limitations. You must know what to release and whatnot to release. Never will your abilities as a JO be put to a more exacting test.

STRUCTURE

In any accident where a number of persons are killed or injured, the quickest and simplest way of writing the story is to use the accident/disaster story structure shown in figure 3-6. This structure is adaptable to all types of accidents and enables you to get the most important facts into the beginning of the story.

Lead

The lead of an accident story introduces the reader to the basic facts in the situation by summarizing the five Ws and H (who, what, when, where, why and how). Consider this example: "Two San Diego sailors were killed and three others seriously injured today when their automobile blew a tire and smashed into a tree on Highway 80, five miles east of El Cajon."

Note that the lead answers all of the five Ws, but does not elaborate on any of them. The most important

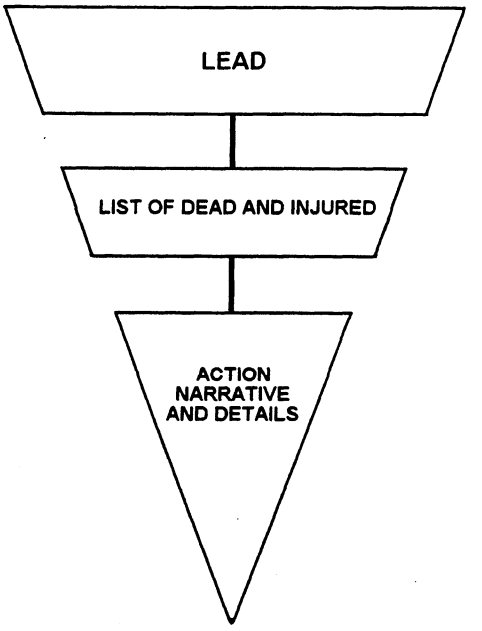

Figure 3-6.—Accident/disaster story structure.

facts in any accident story are the number and identities of the casualties and the cause of the accident. This lead immediately satisfies the reader's initial curiosity about these facts, but more detailed explanations are saved for the body of the story.

Since five people are involved in this accident, it would not be practical to list their names and complete identities in the lead. Therefore, they are included in the next segment of the story.

Casualty List

The casualty list contains the names, ranks or ratings, ages, next of kin, hometown addresses and other pertinent information available on the dead and injured. A casualty list for the above lead might be presented in the proceeding manner (listing should be in alphabetical order to facilitate readers in scanning the list for known names):

> Dead are:
>
> Seaman Apprentice David K. Becker, 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel M. Becker of 821 Sherman Dr., St. Louis, Mo.
>
> Seaman Jackson B. Painter, 22, son of Mr. and Mrs. Carl H. Painter of 680 Deamond St., Elmsdale, R. I., driver of the car.

Injured were:

Seaman Apprentice Bruce J. Burns, 22, son of Mr. and Mrs. Morgan J. Bums of Route 7, Nashville, Term., broken arms, shock.

Fireman Milton M. Jackson, 20, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph J. Jackson of 4210 Florida Ave., Lexington, Ky., skull fracture, internal injuries.

Engineman Third Class John C. Stole, 21, son of Mr. and Mrs. Alton H. Stole of 4109 American Ave., Long Beach, Calif., compound fractures, internal injuries.

The dead are always identified first in the casualty list, followed by the injured

In identifying the victims, it is again emphasized that all pertinent information related to them be included in the list. A newspaper near San Diego might use only the victims' names, ages and rates. The parents' names and hometown addresses might be cut because they have no local news value.

The wire services, however, would want all the information. A story like this would be picked up and served to newspapers in the victims' hometowns. Names of the parents and their addresses are important. By including all the information in your releases, you leave its use up to the discretion of the media. It may also save you the trouble of later answering queries for additional information. Also, note that the driver of the car has been identified among those killed and that specific injuries have been listed for those injured. Most newspapers follow this practice. This eliminates the need for cluttering up the body of the story with these details later.

If there are 10 or more casualties, the recommendation is that you place their names separately at the end of the story. The newspaper can treat the list as a sidebar or run the names in an adjoining box. Too many names in the casualty list cause a big break between the lead and the body, interfering with the story's progress.

The use of a casualty structure has two distinct advantages for the newspaper. First, this treatment gives each name more prominence in the story because of the typographical arrangement. Each victim is listed separately. The reader does not have to ferret out their names from one long paragraph. The reader merely runs down the list quickly to see if there is anybody the reader knows.

Second, the casualty list allows for easier handling in both the editorial department and the composing room.

Let us say the previous story appeared in the first edition of a newspaper. By the time the fourth edition of the paper is ready to go to press, one of the more seriously injured victims dies.

If the casualty structure is used, a complete revision of the story is not necessary. The editor makes a few minor changes in the lead and body of the story, then moves the name from the "injured" heading up to the "dead" heading in the casualty list.

Casualty Releasing Policy

Under most circumstances, the names of casualties cannot be released until the next of kin have been notified. In this case, the story should be written and released in the customary manner. However, the space ordinarily reserved for the casualty list should include the following statement:

"Names of casualties are being withheld pending notification of next of kin."

Later, when the names are released, a newspaper may insert them in the proper place in the story. However, it is neither necessary nor desirable to withhold the other facts in the story until the names are available.

Current policy regarding the release of the names of the dead and injured, such as what can or cannot be released, is contained in *Department of the Navy Public Affairs Policy and Regulations,* SECNAVINST 5720.44A. (This publication will subsequently be referred to by its short title, *PA Regs.)*

If only two or three people are the victims of an accident, their names and identities should be incorporated into the paragraph structure of the story. Do not list them separately, name by name, as in the casualty list.

Let us assume that only one person was killed and another was injured in the previously described auto accident. The following is the way the names would be handled following the lead:

Seaman Jackson B. Painter, 22, the driver of the car, was killed instantly. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Carl H. Painter of 680 Deamond St., Elmsdale, R.I.

Engineman Third Class John C. Stole, 21, a passenger, suffered compound fractures and internal injuries. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Alton H. Stole of 4109 American Ave., Long Beach, Calif.

BODY

The body of an accident story tells the complete story in detail. It maybe developed in either logical or chronological order, but it should be written in a manner appropriate to the subject matter.

A straight fact story concerning a plane crash or an auto accident would ordinarily be developed in logical order after the casualties are listed. The most important facts would be presented first. An accident story, however, is most adaptable to chronological order development. In a heroic rescue, for example, where dramatic details play an important part, the story would be told in narrative form.

STYLE

The style for an accident story is the same as for all newswriting. Simplicity, clarity and brevity are essential elements. More than ever, the writer should tell the story and stick to the facts.

Maudlin sentimentality or emotionalism — the old "hearts and flowers" routine — must be avoided Phrases such as "tragic loss," "grief-striken family" and "went to his final reward" are the marks of an amateur. They are banned inmost newsrooms.

There are also certain errors in syntax that are peculiar to accident stories. Note the examples that follow:

- Death may occur following an operation or during an operation, but not as a **result of an operation.** This implies negligence on the part of the persons performing it.
- Accidents **happen** and explosions **occur,** but neither takes place. That would imply they had been scheduled.
- Everybody dies ultimately of heart failure, not of a heart ailment.
- A fire is not a conflagration until it sweeps a wide area. Conflagrations are rare. A fire approaches conflagration proportions only when three or four city blocks are aflame.
- A fire may damage, destroy, gut or raze a house. It does not, however, partially destroy it or bum it to the ground.
- Although commonly used, planes do not collide in midair. They may collide on the ground or in the air. There is no way of determining midair.

Weather often causes accidents and disasters that make news. In addition, gale warnings, storms at sea and hurricane evacuations play major roles in Navy stories. Simple weather terminology, however, is frequently misused by the Navy journalist.

To avoid such misuse, some of the more common terms and their definitions with which you should become familiar are listed as follows:

- A **gale** is a strong wind with a velocity of 39 to 54 miles per hour.
- A **storm** manifests itself with winds of unusual force, ranging from 54 to 74 miles per hour. It is often accompanied by rain, snow, hail and violent outbursts of thunder and lightning.
- A **hurricane** or **typhoon** is a storm of intense severity and violence with winds exceeding 74 miles per hour. The difference between a hurricane and a typhoon is mostly a matter of geography. Storms west of the international date line are called typhoons; those east of the line are called hurricanes. Both are identified as cyclones in the Indian Ocean.

Certain medical terms crop up in accident stories from time to time. They should be simplified whenever possible as in the following examples:

- Abrasions — scratches
- Lacerations — cuts
- Contusions — bruises
- Trauma — shock

Damage figures are also frequently used. You should keep in mind that initial figures are usually estimates and should be stated as such. If the figures are unusual or high, they should be attributed to the authority who made them.

A person is widely known, not well-known. Nevertheless, even when widely known is used, it must be followed up with specific accomplishments.

Flowery euphemisms — once the rule in journalistic accounts of death — are no longer recommended in straight newswriting. They are less objective and are not more acceptable to the reader. Why say remains, when body is a more accurate description? The body is placed in a coffin, not a casket. It is usually taken home, not shipped. Funeral services, not obsequies, are held. The body is buried, not interned.

The descriptive terms "young," "middle-aged" and "elderly" are often misused because they are relative. The criteria used by The Associate Press is as follows: "A person is young until he is 35, middle-aged from 35 to 65, and elderly after 65." But if you think a person's age is important, why use descriptive adjectives at all? Why not merely identify the person as being 35, 52, 68 or whatever the age maybe?

GATHERING THE FACTS

Gathering the facts for a routine Navy accident story is simple. Often, the best source of information is the personnel office. The "casualty report" made by the personnel office and transmitted by priority message will provide you with most of the necessary information.

In gathering the facts for an accident story, make sure you get the following information:

- Casualty's full name, including rank or rate, file or service number and branch of service.
- Status: Active duty or reserves.
- Type of death: Killed in action, died of wounds received inaction or death from whatever cause; the extent of injury: Injuries sustained and medical listing of patient, when available. Remember to attribute the stated cause of death to competent authority when the cause is not perfectly obvious.
- Date, hour, place, circumstances and cause, when determined.
- Location and disposition of body.
- Full name, addresses and relationship of next of kin.
- Information stating whether next of kin has been officially notified.

These facts usually provide enough information for a start. Note that the following report briefly answers all the questions necessary for an accident story. A few well-placed telephone calls will provide you with any other details you may need. The results may look something like those that follow:

> A Little Creek sailor was killed today when his automobile went out of control, struck a railroad track and overturned on Sewell's Point Road near Ward's Corner.
>
> The sailor was identified as Gunner's Mate First Class John J. Doe, 37, husband of Mrs. Dolores E. Doe of 1717 Atlantic Ave., Atlantic City, N.J.
>
> A veteran of 16 years' naval service, Doe was attached to the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Department, Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base. His death marks the first traffic fatality involving Little Creek naval personnel since February.

A routine accident story of this type usually runs about three or four paragraphs. It is brief and compact, yet contains enough information to satisfy the requirements of most newspapers.

All accident stories, however, are not this simple. When two or more casualties are involved, you will have to dig for more details and write a story with a casualty list. Listed next are some of the facts you should consider:

- **Accurate number and complete identities of the dead and injured.**
- **Cause of the accident.** Authoritative sources should be consulted and quoted whenever necessary. If the cause of the accident is not readily apparent, the story should state, "The cause of the accident is unknown and is under investigation." Although the exact cause of an accident may be unknown, qualifiers sometimes may be used to present a probable cause in the story. For example, "An eyewitness to the crash said that the plane struck a treetop during takeoff." The cause of an accident may be reported after a complete investigation has been made. Meanwhile, do not speculate in your release concerning its cause, especially when negligence or human error is suspected.

- **Date board of inquiry will be convened and its members** (if such a board is formed). Boards of inquiry usually are not formed unless the accident results in a major loss of Navy property, such as a shipboard fire. However, all aircraft accidents, even minor ones, are investigated thoroughly.
- **Lives still imperiled.** If people are still trapped, this rates coverage with the casualties and will require follow-up coverage as well.
- **Property loss or damage. It** is not necessary that you state the price of an airplane each time one crashes, but when a structure is damaged by the crash, media will want to know its value. You might want to keep a list on your desk of Navy aircraft and the approximate cost of each model.
- **Disposition of the dead.** State where the bodies have been taken.
- **Care of the injured.** Like the previous category, the care of the injured is especially applicable in off-station accidents. The story should state where the injured are being treated.
- **Statements from survivors, especially where heroic acts are involved.** Such statements are unnecessary in routine accidents. However, in a major catastrophe, they could be extremely valuable in piecing together a true picture of exactly what happened.
- **Rescue work still underway.** This is related to victims still imperiled.
- **Human interest items.** Noteworthy escapes, rescues or unusual circumstances involved should be acknowledged.

OTHER FACTORS TO KEEP IN MIND

Accidents are caused by various circumstances. The major causes for most accidents are human error, mechanical failure, disturbances of nature and "acts of God."

When a pilot misjudges the plane's altitude, attitude or airspeed and crashes upon the deck of an aircraft carrier, the accident is due to human error.

If a hydraulic catapult aboard the same carrier explodes and kills several aviation boatswain's mates, the cause of the accident might be mechanical failure.

If the same ship were battered about in a violent storm at sea, and several crew members were injured when they were thrown out of their bunks, the accident could be blamed on disturbances of nature.

Finally, there are accidents that cannot be attributed to any of the above causes, and therefore, are classified under "acts of God." Note the following example: A bee stings the coxswain of a motor launch, causing him to lose his footing, fall overboard and drown.

When an accident occurs in the Navy and an account of it gets into the newspaper, the reader automatically looks for someone or something to blame. The reader often forgets that circumstances as well as persons and things cause accidents.

In writing an accident story, the Navy journalist should attempt to explain these circumstances. With proper handling, an accident story may result in better understanding and appreciation by the public of the everyday hazards Navy personnel face.

Take, for example, an aircraft accident in which the pilot manages to parachute to safety just moments before his plane crashes into an isolated field. Regardless of the fact nobody was hurt and there was no private property damage, many readers will approach the facts with a negative point of view. Unless told differently, they will think about the story in terms of carelessness" or "negligence." Either the pilot did not know how to handle the plane, or the ground crew did not adequately prepare it for flight. These are typical reactions.

What the reader does not know, however, is that the plane might have suffered a flame-out over a heavily populated city. To protect the lives of people below, the pilot may have decided to stick with the disabled plane until it reached an unpopulated area. In doing this, the pilot jeopardized his own chances for survival.

The reader never learns these facts unless they are mentioned in the story. Decisions and actions such as these should not be included just in the story; they should be featured in the lead. It is your responsibility to have the common sense and ability to recognize these facts and play them up accordingly.

In another story, a sailor is killed in an auto accident. There is nothing unusual or spectacular about it. Nobody else is involved. The driver was killed when the car blew a tire on a sharp curve, veered out of control and smashed into a utility pole. Circumstances caused the accident.

Yet, when the story is published, a civilian reader may think — "Well, another one of those sailors from the base killed himself today. I wish something would be done about their reckless driving habits. It is not safe to drive the highways anymore."

In a story of this type, the circumstances should be carefully explained. It might also be pointed out in the story that this was the first auto accident in which a sailor was involved in five or six months, if that is the case. Try to wrap up your story with some positive information.

It must be emphasized, however, that under no circumstances should facts be distorted or sugar-coated to put an accident in a favorable light. If mitigating circumstances exist, they should be reported. If they do not exist, tell the story straight and stick to the facts. You should strive to treat all stories as impartially and as objectively as possible. Never give a newspaper, or any other medium for that matter, less than your best effort.